

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2572

As Reported by House Committee On: Health Care

Title: An act relating to establishment of the small employer health insurance partnership program.

Brief Description: Establishing the small employer health insurance partnership program.

Sponsors: Representatives Morrell, Clibborn, Green, Flannigan, Eickmeyer, Conway, Dickerson, Blake, Cody, Wallace, Roberts, Appleton, Hasegawa, McCoy, Linville, Simpson, Chase, Darneille, O'Brien, Murray, B. Sullivan, Ormsby, Springer, Moeller and Kagi.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 1/17/06, 1/27/06 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a premium assistance program for small business through the Health Care Authority.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Campbell, Vice Chair; Morrell, Vice Chair; Appleton, Clibborn, Green, Lantz, Moeller and Schual-Berke.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Curtis, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Bailey, Condotta and Skinner.

Staff: Dave Knutson (786-7146).

Background:

Recent rapid increases in the cost of health care have made it difficult for small employers to afford to provide coverage for their employees health care coverage. The percentage of small employers providing health care coverage for their employees has declined over the past several years. The Health Care Authority provides subsidized health coverage for low-income individuals who meet income eligibility standards through the Basic Health Plan.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

A small employer health insurance partnership program is established in the Health Care Authority. It will provide premium subsidies to eligible employees who are employed by an employer who offers health coverage that has an actuarial value equivalent to that of the Basic Health Plan benefit, and the small employer will pay at least 40 percent of the monthly premium cost for their employee.

The Department of Social and Health Services is directed to submit a request to the federal Department of Health and Human Services for a state Children's Health Insurance Program section 1115 demonstration waiver to seek authorization to draw down Washington's unspent state Children's Health Insurance Program allotment to finance Basic Health Plan coverage for parents of children enrolled in Medicaid or the state Children's Health Insurance Program. Authority is also sought to use the state savings to finance an expansion of the Basic Health Plan or subsidies under the small employer health insurance partnership program.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The authority provided to the Health Care Authority to offer a small group health benefit plan to small employers is removed.

Appropriation: The sum of \$1 million to fund the small employer health insurance partnership program. The sum of \$18.3 million to fund an expansion of the basic health plan.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) Small business needs help providing health coverage for their employees. Costs continue to escalate and more businesses are being forced to drop coverage.

(With concerns) Any solution should be offered through private health carriers.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Len McComb, Community Health Network and Washington State Hospital Association; Sean Corry, Sprague, Israel, Giles, Inc.; James Eachus, EDP System Services, Inc.; Bill Daley, Washington Citizen Action; Dennis Martin, Health Care Authority; Carolyn Logue, National Federation of Independent Business; and Gary Smith, Independent Business Association.

(With concerns) Mellani McAleenan, Association of Washington Business; and Mel Sorensen, America's Health Insurance Plans and Washington Association of Health Underwriters.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.